At Last I am Free

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by Zigzagwanderer

Summary

Sorry, but this is just a really little thing about the rings. Couldn't stop wondering about those rings....what would H pick out?? So here is my answer to anyone who wondered too! Anyway, takes place the morning after Dreams are Like Water.

Will wants to go outside. They go outside. The bunched edges of their blankets sop up greened rain from the grass; madeleines dipped in sweet tea.

Hannibal is not fond of mulch between his toes, and the horizon is ranged with an embarrassment of condensing mountains that are just shy of gaudy, but beneath the petrichor there is the scent of Hannibal on Will, and of Will himself, hot and heady, so Hannibal tolerates the uncouth commentary of the seals, and waits.

Once the pink has calmed itself to a cleaner, creamier blue, Will extends his hand and admires, or more accurately, scrutinises, the ring on his finger.
The tungsten is dull, the deeply etched lines a darker grey in the sombre lustre of the wedding band.

“I thought the cuts were…meant to be like the waterways around here. Streams and currents. But they’re not, are they?”

Will’s exposed upper arm is prickled by the salt breeze and Hannibal escorts his gaze firmly back down the muscle and along the slim wrist to look at what Will wants him to look at.

“They can be, if you wish. They are simply lines, and so are quite open to interpretation. It is true that you are very lovely when you are absorbed in studying the undertows. Perhaps I thought to celebrate that.”
Hannibal is tired, and cannot resist, and so rests his lips briefly against the maddening arch of Will’s neck. He murmurs; “My symbolism does not have to be your symbolism.”

“Sure,” Will snorts, “but you’d prefer me to guess again?”

There is a graze of teeth on tendon, and that answer is just fine with Will.

He wipes his glasses. Observes. “These sharp tips, branching out, here, and here.” It is a compliment to Hannibal that he couldn’t see this last night. “Antlers? Antlers. Curved around in a circlet? Without beginning or end.”

He traces the hollowed run of beam and tines with a fingertip.

Kisses prod again, passion as motivation and reward.

Will turns a little, and makes an ocean sound.

The dogs, of course, choose to reclaim their island at that moment, Sandy bashful in his greeting, still expecting his good fortune to have abandoned him during the night, Conn thundering away between the smokehouse and the sauna, driven by the fresh sensory banquet the dawn has brought to Vakkrehejm.

“We live, with *constant* interruption, on the archipelago of broken antlers. According to legend. Where the father of gods shattered the crown of the great feathered stag, palm, point and pearl, and cast the pieces down to make land where there was none before.”
“But there’s more to it?” Will is thoughtful, drawing out the puzzle. “You could put

something in the channels, they're cut that way. Deep enough into the metal. To hold something. Inlay of some kind."

"You require *diamonds* now?"

The wading birds flutter off the shallows then, as alarmed at Will's laughter as Hannibal is enraptured. "I was assuming antler itself. Easy enough to find debris from ruts and shedding around here. The boys bring it back all the time, when we go exploring on the outer islets. Some of it's prehistoric."

The sunlight tilts and strikes at their outbuildings. Slants of jonquil and an almost-green. There are undoubtedly suitable tools for such work in their palatial shed. It is Will's favourite part of the island. His stuff, Hannibal's stuff, easels and workbenches and piano parts and spare rod reels. Balanced utility and pleasure, and while all things within are placed precisely apart, where they should be, it is all adjacent, and companionable. Unmistakeably *together*.

"I could probably get to grips with it. Slicing and shaping the antler," Will offers quietly. "Fitting it into the settings somehow. May need some practise, some instructional videos. I think I could do it, if you'd like me to try."

Hannibal is still for a moment. But not because he does not value Will's talents.

His voice, when it comes, is odd.

"Bone." He states the desire. Wondrously, miraculously, he is unafraid. A lifetime of solitary trepidation is falling away into the straits, ripped apart by the relentless, rippling flows into nothing at all.
"I had hoped for bone." He clears some strange texture from his throat. "Take mine, if it comes to it."

Will pauses, then holds the warm flesh of Hannibal's hand instead. "Or mine," he counters mildly, husband to husband. "If it comes to it."

Hannibal can scarcely breathe. Pats his thigh so that Sandy, who understands his incredulity, comes trotting to him. Distracts himself by bending down into the wet turf to ruffle yellow fur. Steadies himself by raking furrows in the gold. "We could consider the bones of the past," he says, when he can speak. "There are debts down to the marrow that we could collect."

Hannibal feels Will shed his blanket. He dares not turn. Cannot look up. Sandy wanders away.

"No. I think the rings are asking for something from our future," Will says it like it is a vow. He is also careful, and somewhat rueful. "And by the time I learn how to be any kind of a craftsman in this, to complete *our* design, I should be ready to help you harvest the…raw material."

Will reaches down to Hannibal. And now Hannibal does stand. And they rise together. And Will encloses him utterly, like it is a vow.

But not in folds of cashmere, but in something as durable as tungsten, and as deep as bone.

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